

# The 2008 legislative session: What business wants

**A**s 2008 quickly approaches, the Kentucky General Assembly soon will be in session with many difficult decisions to make.

Gov. Steve Beshear's first budget will be under consideration, and hundreds of competing interest groups will be working to sway lawmakers' opinions.

The Kentucky Chamber of Commerce also will be at the Capitol, speaking for the business community of Kentucky and hoping to improve the state's business climate for all Kentuckians.

After talking to hundreds of business leaders across the commonwealth, the Chamber has developed a legislative agenda, "Bold Steps to Advance Kentucky."

These bold steps include five top priorities aimed at making Kentucky more competitive: improving education; affordable health care; reducing workers' compensation costs; fixing the public employee benefits problem; and providing incentives to grow small businesses.

## Postsecondary education

On Dec. 4, the chamber's Task Force on Postsecondary Education released the findings of a study launched in May.

The study, which researched the strengths and weaknesses of Kentucky's college and university system, will shape the basis of the chamber's public agenda on higher education.

Students are entitled to a world-class education that prepares them for today's globally competitive market and provides employers with the highly skilled employees to do the same.

## Workers' compensation

The chamber is helping to create workers' compensation legislation that clearly defines injury and disability, requires independent medical examinations and objective medical findings, protects the integrity of exclusive remedy, and minimizes litigation.

The chamber supports legislation that overturns case law that runs counter to these core principles, and it supports legislative and regulatory efforts to control rising medical and prescription drug costs.

## Health care costs

With the ever-rising costs of health care, the business community supports a comprehensive state strategy to increase the number of medical professionals trained in Kentucky as well as innovative approaches to encourage them to practice in the commonwealth.

The chamber also advocates incentives for businesses to offer wellness programs and wants to make permanent an earlier law that requires quality health care cost information to be made available to consumers.

Additionally, in an effort to discourage smoking, the chamber favors an increased cigarette tax — an issue



**GUEST  
COMMENT**

Dave Adkisson

the majority of our members support.

## Small-business incentives

Small, locally owned businesses provide more than half of the jobs across Kentucky, and in some regions, the percentage is even higher.

Too many small businesses fail when they could have succeeded, and too many struggle for too long simply to stay afloat when they should be in a position to think about growth.

In addition to offering incentives to locate companies in Kentucky, we believe it is time for the commonwealth to provide additional incentives to help small Kentucky companies grow and create jobs. These jobs, created by Kentuckians, are more likely to stay in Kentucky.

## Public employee benefits

Last year, in partnership with the Prichard Committee for Academic Excel-

lence and the Kentucky League of Cities, the chamber launched the Coalition for Sustainable Public Employee Benefits.

As a part of this project, the chamber will focus on working with the General Assembly and executive branch to develop a meaningful solution to the growing costs of public employee benefits.

Meaningful reform must take into consideration strategies that private employers have addressed, including cost-saving changes to eligibility requirements, pension benefits, health care benefits and compensation levels.

As public retirement and health care costs escalate, they drain tax dollars away from basic services and education on the state and local level. Between 1996 and 2008, health care and retirement costs consumed most of the new money appropriated for education.

We believe there are several key opportunities for the business community to have a positive impact in the 2008 session of the Kentucky General Assembly. These bold steps to advance Kentucky will help not only Kentucky companies thrive but, more important, all Kentuckians.

**Dave Adkisson** is president and CEO of the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce.

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